

# An Evaluation of the Use of Partnerships to Address Environmental Justice Issues in Communities: Methodological Considerations

*"We're talking about safety, housing, trucks, and all the things that are important to the community."*

*"Impact [of the partnership] so far is enthusiasm...there was a time when people felt hopeless about their future. Now people feel positive about their future."*

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# Overview of Presentation

- ◆ Background on environmental justice (EJ) and EJ multi-stakeholder collaborative partnerships
- ◆ Challenges of evaluating collaborative partnerships
- ◆ Study methodology
- ◆ Advantages and lessons learned

# Environmental Justice

- ◆ EPA defines Environmental Justice (EJ) as equal protection from environmental hazards for individuals, groups, or communities regardless of race, ethnicity, or economic status
- ◆ EJ emerged as an issue in the U.S. starting in 1980s with grassroots protests and academic research pointing to disparities in exposure to environmental hazards

# Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice

- ◆ U.S. EPA established Office of Environmental Justice (1990s)
- ◆ Presidential Executive Order issued requiring all federal agencies to ensure that EJ issues are addressed in all agency programs
- ◆ Establishment of a multi-stakeholder federal advisory board on EJ
- ◆ Establishment of the federal interagency working group to address EJ
- ◆ EPA Administrator releases memo affirming EPA commitment to EJ (2001)

# Federal Interagency Working Group on EJ

- ◆ Consists of high-ranking officials from at least 11 federal agencies
- ◆ Initiated Action Agenda in 1999 to better ensure EJ concerns are incorporated into all federal policies

# Working Group's Action Agenda

- ◆ Key focus was to build dynamic and proactive partnerships that better enable those communities that suffer disproportionate environmental impacts to better access federal programs and improve their quality of life
- ◆ In June 2000 IWG announced 15 national demonstration projects
- ◆ In March 2003 IWG announced 15 new projects
- ◆ EPA will soon be awarding annual collaborative problem-solving grants to organizations working together to solve local environmental justice problems

# Why is the Federal Government Advocating Collaboration to Address EJ Issues?

- ◆ By the time community-based EJ issues reach federal government, they...
  - cut across agency jurisdictions or areas of expertise;
  - involve many stakeholders holding mutually inconsistent perspectives about the nature of the issues confronting them; and;
  - involve parties having longstanding, adversarial relationships.
- ◆ IWG argued that the use of a multi-stakeholder collaborative effort can be an effective way to achieve sustainable, quality-of-life improvements for affected communities in which issues have taken “the form of intractable, multifaceted, and multi-layered disputes.”

# Collaborative Partnerships in Environmental Justice Communities

- ◆ Projects driven by a number of organizations to assist low-income and/or minority communities that have been overburdened with polluting facilities, contaminated or abandoned sites, inadequate housing, crime, and other similar issues
- ◆ Government agencies, foundations, and businesses are asked to sit alongside community members to fashion joint solutions for addressing an array of challenging EJ problems



# Demonstration Project Selection Criteria

## ◆ Projects had to...

- Represent areas that were predominantly minority or low-income populations
- Be community-based
- Have strong community interest
- Have the commitment of at least two federal agencies to participate
- Be committed to using multi-stakeholder collaborative problem-solving

# Collaborative Partnership: ReGenesis Partnership

- ◆ Two isolated urban/rural neighborhoods, Spartanburg, SC
- ◆ African American, low income
- ◆ Partners: Grassroots group, city, county, EPA; now 170 other organizations
- ◆ Partnership addressing
  - health concerns
  - cleanup & revitalization of contaminated & other abandoned sites



# Collaborative Partnership: Barrio Logan Partnership

- ◆ Inner city, San Diego
- ◆ Predominantly Latino & low income
- ◆ Partners: Community groups, city, state, EPA, HUD, business,
- ◆ Partnership addressing
  - health problems
  - incompatible land uses
  - children's health, indoor pollutants, & lead paint



# Why is Evaluation of the Collaborative Partnership Approach Important?

- ◆ Represent an alternative approach to more traditional confrontational means
- ◆ Represent an important step by federal, state, and local government, businesses, and foundations to reach out in a more pro-active and problem-solving manner manner to communities
- ◆ Significant resources and time devoted to this approach – desire to understand effectiveness
- ◆ Number of, and support for these partnerships is growing – desire information for planning purposes

# Is the collaborative approach working?

- ◆ September 2001 –EPA began conducting interviews with partnership stakeholders
- ◆ September 2002 –EPA released full report and case studies for review

# Challenges Associated with EPA's Evaluation?

- ◆ Challenging audiences at several levels
- ◆ Partnerships spread across US
- ◆ Partnerships very diverse and at different stages of development
- ◆ Obtaining buy-in for the evaluation from partnership leadership
- ◆ Few built-in performance measures and monitoring data to work with
- ◆ Constraints of the Paperwork Reduction Act

# Evaluation Challenges: Each Partnership is Unique

- ◆ Different Goals: Some partnerships address specific problems while others aim for comprehensive community revitalization
- ◆ Different time horizons
- ◆ Different number of stakeholders
- ◆ Different organizational structures
- ◆ Different geographic scopes

# Evaluation Challenges: What should be measured?

- ◆ Empowerment of the different organizations and community groups involved? (sited by participants in evaluation as most significant outcome)
- ◆ Number of effective relationships created? (Increase in trust?)
- ◆ Number of “hard outputs” the partnership produced? (e.g. centers established; sites remediated; units de-leaded; affordable housing built,...)
- ◆ Perceived quality of life improvements as a result of the partnership?



# Evaluation Challenges: Drawing the links?

- ◆ Who gets credit for a partnership outcome?
- ◆ Can a partnership be credited for stimulating action by local, state, or federal agencies?
- ◆ What intermediate measures demonstrate success in a long-term partnership?

# Evaluation Challenges: Locating the Data

- ◆ What if the partnership doesn't have baseline or performance data?
- ◆ Who do you talk with?
- ◆ What meetings do you observe?
- ◆ How do you ensure you're getting an accurate picture?

# Partnership Study Methodology

- ◆ Consultation with range of stakeholders to help develop methodology
  - Facilitated national conference calls to obtain advice from evaluation experts, local partnership leaders, and agency representatives
- ◆ Review of six partnerships in various stages of implementation
- ◆ Development of six distinct case studies
- ◆ Analysis of case studies for overall patterns
- ◆ Review of draft case studies and cross-case analysis by interviewees and others

# Case Study Methodology

- ◆ Reviewed partnership documentation
  - 15-75 documents per partnership; included written community histories, formal project reports, fact sheets, site assessments, planning documents,...
- ◆ Interviewed roughly 10-16 people per partnership
  - Conducted 66 separate interviews with a total of 79 individuals
- ◆ Sought a range of different stakeholders who had a strong understanding of the partnership
- ◆ Used a semi-structured, open-ended interview guide that was adapted when needed

# Case Study Methodology - Structure

- ◆ Community History
- ◆ Partnership Background
- ◆ Partnership Goals and Processes
- ◆ Partnership Activities
- ◆ Measuring Partnership Success
- ◆ Partnership Success and Challenges
- ◆ Recommendations for Improving the Partnership
- ◆ Lessons for Other Communities Considering Partnerships
- ◆ Value of Federal Involvement
- ◆ Findings

# Case Study Methodology: Interview Approach

## ◆ The evaluation team...

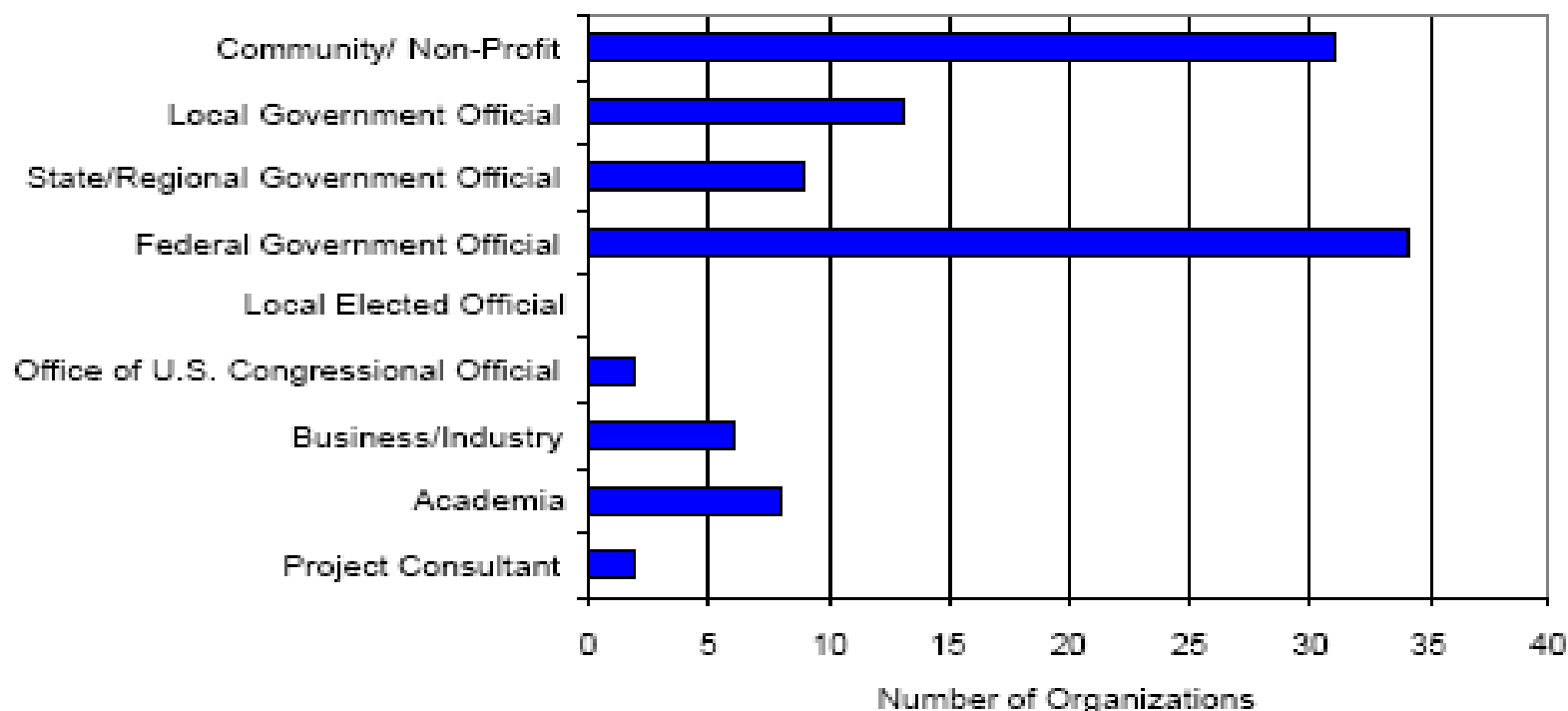
- Interviewed people who were the most knowledgeable about the partnerships
- Framed partnerships primarily through partnership members' perspectives
- Rarely limited interviewee responses to specific response options
- Allowed interviewees' voices to come through strongly

## ◆ The team did not...

- Include many perspectives from outside partnerships
- Ensure perfect balance in stakeholders reviewed across all partnerships
- Ask all interviewees all the questions in the guide

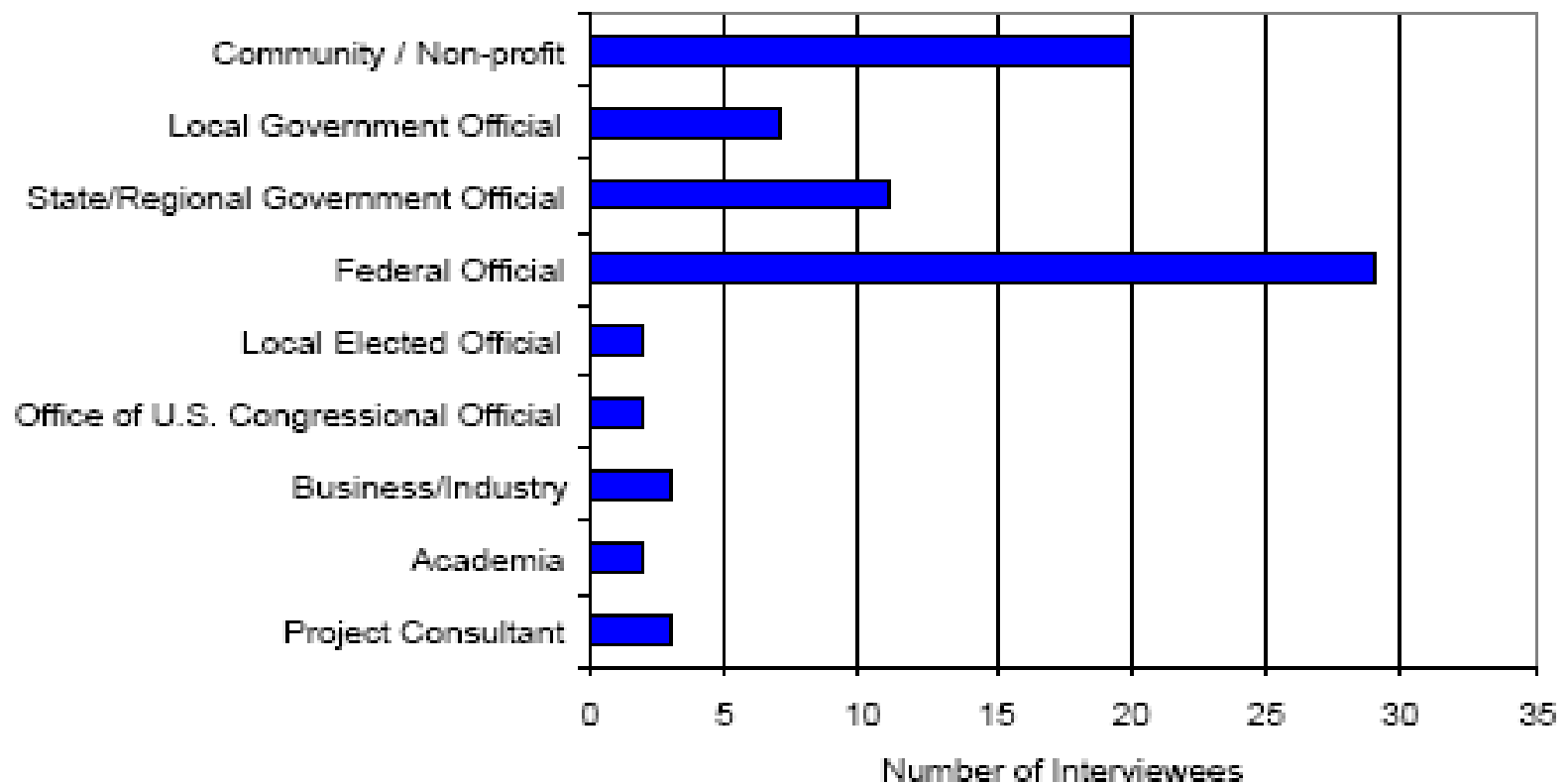
# Partnership Participants

Types of Organizations Participating in the Six Partnerships Reviewed  
Based Upon December 2000 Interim Progress Report List



# Interviewee Make-up

Interviewees for the Six Partnerships Reviewed by Organizational Type (September 2001-March 2002)





# Interview Data to Partnership Analysis

- ◆ Used interviewee data to build categories of responses for each main evaluation question
- ◆ Aggregated responses across the case studies for key questions
- ◆ Analyzed case studies with a focus on:
  - Partnership, activities, and outcomes
  - Key factors influencing partnership success
  - Value of multi-stakeholder collaborative partnerships to address environmental justice issues
  - Value of federal agency involvement in these efforts

# Part of an Interview Data Analysis Sheet

Greatest Success 5.1		1	2	3	4
		formation/operation of partnership	ability to put aside disagreements outside partnership and still participate in good faith	partnership's ability to continue operating	too early to tell
Barrio Logan	14	9	1	1	3
Bridges to Friendship	28	10			
Metlakatla	16	4			
Metro East	24	5		1	
New Madrid	8				
Spartanburg	22	10			
<b>Total</b>	<b>106</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Percentage</b>		<b>36%</b>	<b>1%</b>	<b>2%</b>	<b>3%</b>

# Looking Across the 6 Partnerships

Greatest Successes Across EJ Collaborative Partnerships	Number who identified as greatest success
Formation/operation of partnership	38
Strong involvement of community/community organizations	14
Implementation of partnership-specific environmental protection or socio-economic development activities	12
Decrease of duplicative activities	9
Able to more effectively perform public health and environmental protection activities	5
Community empowerment	3
Increased ability to generate creative ideas to resolve difficult issues	3
Too early to tell	3
Improved interagency understanding	2
Ability to accomplish much with minimal conflict	2
Securing, organization, and assignment of funding	2
Designation/visibility gained as a result of designation as an IWG national demonstration project	2
Dedication of partners	2
Types of partners involved	2
Partnership's ability to continue operating	2
Spin-off activities initiated because of partnership	1
Increase in community pride	1
Initiation of a team-building exercise	1
Federal agencies' improved understanding of community's needs	1
Community's improved understanding that fed agencies are concerned about them	1
Community's increased understanding of a military installation	1
Ability to put aside disagreements outside partnership and still participate in good faith	1

*Table 2. Greatest Successes Across EJ Collaborative Partnerships.* Note: approximately 75 interviewees provided a total of 108 responses. An additional four were not asked or did not answer the question, including three with New Madrid and one with Bridges to Friendship.

# Report Review Process

- ◆ Case studies reviewed by interviewees once draft completed
- ◆ Full report & case studies distributed to approximately 180 people for review
  - Interviewees
  - IWG members
  - Participants in national conference calls
  - 36 non-affiliated reviewers

# Advantages of this Partnership Study Methodology

- ◆ Enabled IWG to to begin understanding participant perspectives regarding their partnerships
- ◆ Identified some factors that may be influencing or impeding the success of these partnerships
- ◆ Identified the limitations of our evaluation effort and what might be done to improve such evaluations in the future

# Lessons Learned: Recommendations for Large-Scale Multi-Site Evaluations with Limited Resources

- ◆ Encourage programs to develop “theories of change”, performance measures, and to begin measuring well in advance of evaluation
- ◆ Do as much front end writing on report/case studies as possible before conducting interviews
- ◆ Ask extensive questions to just a few, and a limited set to the broader group
- ◆ Conduct as many interviews as possible via phone
- ◆ Use travel dollars to see the program “in action”

- ◆ To view the report upon which this presentation is based see <http://www.epa.gov/evaluate/ej.htm>
- ◆ For more information on this presentation contact Brian Swett, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, 202-566-2202 ; swett.brian@epa.gov)
- ◆ For more information on the use of collaborative partnerships to assist distressed communities see <http://www.epa.gov/compliance/environmentaljustice/interagency/index.html>
- ◆ For a new report on partnerships by the National Academy of Public Administration see <http://www.napawash.org/Pubs/HPPFullReport.PDF>